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ABSTRACT

As schools primarily use human resources to accomplish their mission of developing the potential of students, their success is contingent upon the quality of the people employed by the schools. Thus, the selection and development of professionals within the schools is the most important responsibility of the school board and superintendent. The first step toward developing an excellent school system involves an indepth assessment of all school district personnel, beginning with the leaders. Assessment involves measuring each individual's sense of purpose, interactive relationships, and methods and strategies for helping others grow. Possible assessment methods include the structured interview, an attitude and behavioral checklist for self-assessment, and a checklist for feedback completed by people in close contact with the person being assessed. Comparison of this assessment information with high ideals of excellence will create awareness of individual needs. Before planning one's growth, however, some basic guidelines must be known. Growth plans must: (1) be individually tailored, (2) focus upon individuals effectively aiding their audience, (3) allow one to change oneself, (4) allow others to change themselves, (5) use creative strategies, (6) involve close contact with caring and competent helpers, (7) have measurable criteria, (8) involve someone else in their assessment, and (9) be monitored frequently. (DCS)

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Ventures for Excellence

How to Mobilize the Human Resources in your School District

--By Vic Cottrell, Ed.D, President, Ventures for Excellence

Part I - A Rationale for Indepth Personnel Assessment

Do you believe some school districts are better than others? Most people we meet believe there are superior school districts and most ultimately see the difference in terms of the quality of the people. The school board members, superintendent, administrators, teachers, counselors, cooks, custodians, bus drivers, students, parents, patrons, make the real difference. The people in the schools and community in turn provide the facilities, learning materials, desks, etc., which are used by the people to help students learn and grow.

When an analysis is made of a school operating budget, we find that approximately 85 percent of most school districts' budgets are used to employ human services. Schools primarily use human resources to accomplish their mission—to develop the potential of students. The development of students to their fullest potential is contingent upon the quality of the people employed by the schools.

We believe the selection and development of professionals within the schools is the most important responsibility of the school board and superintendent. When highly talented service-centered people are employed in the schools, great progress is made with students. Recognizing and developing the helping talents of all school employees makes the real difference in schools, not per capita student expenditures, physical facilities, academic degrees, tradition, or curriculum. School leaders must recognize this fact and take strong definitive action based upon this reality.

ASSESSMENT MUST HAVE A FIRST PRIORITY!

The first step toward developing an excellent school system rests upon the

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assessment of key individuals within the schools. The leaders of most school systems we study have made minimal strides toward indepth assessment of school professionals. Furthermore, seldom does there exist a significant ongoing budget allocation to insure the existence and continuation of this most important function.

We believe professional personnel assessment is even more important than assessing students and monitoring student achievement. This does not suggest that student assessment is not important; indeed, it is one of the most important functions of a school, but professional assessment is even more important! How can a mediocre teacher assess a student effectively? How can a mediocre principal employ and assess a teacher effectively? How can a mediocre school board member select and assess the performance of the superintendent? An effective personnel assessment system requires an extremely high level of competence of people at the top of the structure.

TO ASSESS, START AT THE TOP!

To make the greatest long-range difference in a school system, it is essential to assess, identify strengths, and develop the talents of the people at the top of the structure. The quality of leadership provided by the school board and superintendent make a profound impact upon all personnel within the entire school district and community. It is therefore imperative that any highly significant assessment and development impetus begin with school board members and central office administrators.

Unless school board members and central office administrators are willing to assess in depth, to take a close look at their core attitudes, skills and behaviors the likelihood of any assessment system working in a highly effective way in a school district is very minimal. Significant assessment, followed by obviously attitudinal and behavioral changes coupled with documentation of results, sets an example others in the school district will be more likely to follow. Such an example, however, is hard work on the part of the leadership and therefore requires high levels of commitment from all individuals involved. Don't forget, it must start at the top.

DETERMINE WHAT TO ASSESS IN HUMAN ATTITUDES, SKILLS AND BEHAVIORS!

What do you want to assess in a school professional? If we accept the core premise that schools exist solely for the purpose of developing human potential, we must focus our primary attention in assessment upon measuring this core

mission. Every professional in a school must constantly be perfecting his or her attitudes, skills and behaviors toward helping other people become better. They must become highly competent and increasingly skillful toward helping other people grow. The core purpose of developing human potential must abound and reverberate through the lives of all people within the school system in order for schools to move toward excellence.

Have a purpose! Since the development of human resource is so very essential to a viable school system, it is important to know how this reality is lived out in the lives of school board members, administrators, teachers, and all employees. This thrust will take various forms depending on the specific role the person performs, but there are some core attitudes and behaviors found in common regardless of role performed within the schools. A sense of purpose or mission toward the development of others carries some core elements which can be recognized in people striving toward excellence in this area. An individual with a high sense of purpose, for example, carries with him or her a clear vision of anticipated results, a sense of urgency, and a high consistency of direction regardless of obstacles along the way.

Relate effectively to people! Another core element of human resource development is the ability of the individual to relate in highly effective, interactive and supportive ways with others. Open, honest, candid, trusting, two-way communication is essential. Acquiring and retaining a high awareness and appreciation of the thoughts and feelings of others is essential for an excellent people developer. Such a person creates an emotional atmosphere which encourages others to think, act, and grow without fear of intimidation or rejection.

Outstanding people developers also have specific methods and strategies which free people to grow! Knowing the basic strengths of people, appreciating and acting upon their interests, bringing individuals in contact with people who challenge the growth of each other, planning and organizing together, defining measurable goals, monitoring progress and celebrating results are all attributes of an excellent people developer.

The task of measuring an individual's sense of purpose, interactive relationships as well as methods and strategies for helping others grow, must form the basis for any meaningful personnel assessment process within a school district. The challenge is making this realization a functional reality.

MEASURE IN DEPTH HUMAN DEVELOPMENT QUALITIES

Finding ways to measure qualities of excellence in human development is complex, but the clearer we can define the qualities to be measured in practical attitudes and behaviors, the more effective the process can become. Associates with Ventures for Excellence have been working hard on this task for many years and as a result have developed some core qualities which help many professionals focus more specifically on the excellence they want to measure. A reveiw of these qualities as they are defined for board members, administrators, teachers, and other school professionals will be helpful. Regardless of the definitions of excellence you choose, it is vital that they be defined in clear, precise terms.

We find one highly effective method of assessment of defined qualities is the structured interview. The structured interview is a sophisticated instrument with questions designed to measure the intensity of the qualities being measured in the lifestyle of the individual being studied. This process of low stress questioning allows the trained assessor to carefully and in great depth identify the thought patterns, attitudes, skills and most likely behaviors of the person being studied. The interview is tape recorded to allow for fast and accurate retrieval of interviewee responses. Furthermore, the interview is type scripted and the responses are sorted into specific categories for further indepth study by the trained assessor. The information collected is then transferred into an attitudes, skills and behavioral checklist which allows for comparison with the ideals of excellence in the area being studied. One of the great strengths of this approach is that the information is obtained from the single most valid source of information, the individual himself or herself. Information collected from the person is readily accepted by most individuals as reasonably accurate. The limitations of the structured interview approach are the fact that the person may not always be totally honest or the interviewee may not always find it possible to describe themselves in clear and precise terms. Most people, however, with a reasonable degree of expressiveness, are able to make themselves quite clear.

A second type of assessment process we use also comes from the individual being studied. This second source of information takes the form of an attitude and behavioral checklist for self-assessment. In this process, the individual is asked to describe the extent to which specific attitudes or behaviors are operational in the particular day-by-day job function. Usually, the self-

-assessment checklist is responded to with a 5 point scale ranging from seldom to almost always. Our experience with self-assessment checklists suggests that the information collected is often superficial and frequently inadequate when compared to other information gathering processes used in assessment. It does, however, provide another perspective which can be very helpful in growth planning with the individual.

A third source of information can be acquired from the people being served by the individual being assessed. An attitude and behavioral checklist for feedback completed by people in close contact with the person being assessed can often provide highly valuable information. For example, specific feedback about the attitudes and behaviors of a teacher from students in the classroom can be quite accurate if the students are adequately prepared for the experience and have had several other teachers for comparison purposes. The same process is helpful at the principal level since very accurate information about the attitudes, skills and behaviors of the principal can be acquired through asking for specific information from teachers with whom he or she works closely. One limitation of this process is that frequently it is threatening to the person being assessed. We recommend information collected in this manner be voluntary on the part of the person being assessed. Once the person has agreed to this source of information, it is best to have the data collected in an anonymous manner and if possible, compiled by a third party. The information from a total group of 30 to 40 people is more accurate than to study individual responses. Even though this process is somewhat threatening to some people, our experience suggests that most respondents will give the individual more credit than they likely merit.

There exists many alternative ways to assess the performance of individuals, but we find the most helpful sources to be found within the individual him/herself coupled with feedback from the various audiences being served by the person. All the assessment processes, however, have their limitations so it is important not to rely on a single source of information. We highly recommend the use of multiple sources but while utilizing multiple sources, acquire the same core information from the various audiences or sources.

COMPARE ASSESSMENT INFORMATION TO IDEALS OF EXCELLENCE!

Regardless of the sources or extent of the information collected in the assessment process if the purpose of the assessment process is for growth, never use a criteria reference which defines minimal expectations, for at best such a criteria leads toward mediocrity. Always assess in terms of the highest ideals to which you are striving. Excellence is perfection which can never quite be attained in all areas by anyone, but striving toward excellence generates growth in people. One exciting aspect of using ideals of excellence is that the strongest and most capable professionals in the group being studied ultimately make the most strides in growth. These highly talented people want to be the best and high ideals encourage excellence on their part as well as all people involved in the process.

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION MANDATES ACTION!

Why have an assessment of school personnel if no systematic action is taken upon the findings? Assessment done properly creates awareness of needs on the part of all individuals. Assessment based upon ideals of excellence challenges the thinking of people toward increasingly high levels of performance. The first step toward mobilizing the human resources in your district is an indepth individual assessment process starting with people at the top of the structure. Next, we will consider more fully how to take action upon the findings of the assessment process.

How to Mobilize the Human Resources in your School District

Part II - A Rationale for Personalized Growth Planning

The planning for professional growth within a school district requires a careful look at the basic assessment of the individual being studied. Professionals participating in the Ventures for Excellence board member, administrator or teacher inventories at this point would already have a great deal of assessment information which will help them in their growth planning. The individual interview, the behavioral checklist, the description of overall qualities, the person's self-assessment, the feedback from the various audiences being served, the assessment from the supervisor or administrator responsible to the particular individual, are all sources of information which can be helpful. Once this data has become collected and has been studied carefully, the person involved is now ready to map out their future. Some basic guidelines, however, are important to be explored in designing the future.

Remember, you are a unique individual. Any growth plan must be tailored to your uniqueness. It must be designed to encourage the utilization of your strengths, interests, and core aspirations. It should be a picture of you in your becoming. No one in the world is quite like you. No one has had the experiences in exactly the same way you have had experiences and no one will have a growth plan exactly like your own. Be creative. Search for your uniqueness; capitalize on your strenghts.

What group of people or individuals do you want to impact? Any growth plan for a helping professional must focus upon you becoming more effective and efficient toward positively impacting your desired audiences. If you are a teacher, for example, it is very important that your growth plan focus at least in part upon the student audience you are seeking to serve. If you are an

administrator, it is critically important that your growth plan at least in part impact upon the teachers you are seeking to serve or parents or students you are seeking to serve. Remember, you are in a helping profession and your responsibility is to assist others in their growth. This requires impacting specific individuals and groups of people.

Change yourself! Change is good. Change is fulfilling when it helps you to become more of what you're capable of becoming. As you are able to change yourself in significant ways, you are more likely in turn to be able to impact the desired audience. If I want people, for example, to listen more to me, I must be willing to change my behavior to be an excellent listener to them. If I want people to be more empathetic and understanding of my job role and responsibilities, it's critically important that I become keenly aware and understanding of the other person's world. Remember, leaders have a profound impact upon the behaviors of others. The examples the teacher or administrator sets before the audiences they desire to impact makes a profound impact upon that audience. Once the change is defined, a high level of consistency is critically important in order to impact in the long run the desired audience.

Do you really want someone else to change? Most of us would like to have other people change, but people are most likely to change only when they decide for themselves they are going to change. If your growth plan expects a change in another person or another audience, it is critically important that you acquire the consent of the person or persons involved before you solidify your growth plan. If you want your teachers, for example, to become more effective in understanding the home environment in which the children in your school live, it is very important for the teachers to agree upon this as a high priority. Don't expect people to make changes just because you want them to change. They must be committed to the change as well.

Be creative in your strategizing. Once you define your growth plan, remember, there are multiple ways that can be used to achieve the desired outcomes. It is vital to brainstorm and continue to brainstorm multiple options. Once creative options have become a part of your lifestyle, you with the help of others can evaluate the most important and the most appropriate plan of action. If you are blocked in achieving your desired outcomes, it is very likely it is because you have failed to explore enough alternatives. Most "can'ts" become "cans" when enough alternatives are explored.

Choose people to help you. Your growth and progress is most likely to occur when you are in constant contact with caring and competent helpers. Don't just choose the person you are most comfortable with, choose one you know is plotting to do you good and will challenge you to do your very best. We encourage you to find more than one helper and to have one of your helpers be a "superior" within the organization as well as several you are responsible for managing or impacting. The more people you can conscientiously seek out to help you in the successful completion of your growth plan, the more likely you are to succeed. Remember, let people know what you are trying to acheive and they will most likely help you achieve it.

Have someone else help you appraise the effectiveness of your growth plan. This does not require someone to be in constant contact with you or in constant observation of your attitudes and behaviors. Although this is helpful, this person may be most effective in compiling information you have collected and making assessments and evaluations of it.

Can you measure your accomplishments? Any growth plan to be effective must have some measurable criteria so that you will know results have occurred. The focus of the measurement needs to be on desired outcomes rather than measurement of the action taken. You may have many strategies, for example, to listen more effectively to people but if people have not been able to observe or see or become aware of a significant change in your listening ability, you have not achieved your desired outcomes. Be sure your plan has measurement built into it which includes objective, systematic feedback from the audiences you are seeking to impact. Don't be satisfied with just one way of measuring results. Just as in the assessment process it is important to use many approaches to assessing your current status, likewise it is very important to use multiple sources in the measurement of your progress. It is important for you to include in your initial designing of your growth plan multiple ways to measure results.

Monitor your growth frequently. What would happen with most students if we tried to provide objective measurement of their progress once or even twice a year? Most highly effective teachers have ways of monitoring progress on a weekly basis. This same concept is true with you. If you have ongoing ways of monitoring and measuring your improvement, you are likely to make much more significant progress toward your desired outcome. Plan for weekly or at least bi-weekly input which documents your continuing change.

Growth and progress for a helping professional is something which requires persistence and long-term goals. While you are completing your growth plan, however, it is important for you to continue to live up to the core expectations of your job. A significant growth plan is something which helps you to do your job better, but it is also done within a framework of continuing to achieve in all areas of job responsibility.

Highly talented people like to grow, improve, and strive toward excellence. Just as mediocrity cannot be tolerated in the classroom, lack of significant progress on the part of professionals over a significant period of time will deaden the organization. A strong, viable, dynamic organization of people requires a vision of what can be coupled with all people doing their part in specific tangible ways to bring reality to the vision.

Remember, the development of youth is the single most important responsibility of any community. We all can be a part of fulfilling this responsibility in ways which are meaningful for us and growthful for us in the process. Your personalized growth plan helps you make your vision for youth a reality.

The most important responsibility of any community is the development of its youth.

School administrators are especially privileged people for they mobilize the human and material resources to help our youth become everything they are capable of becoming.